PFEIFFER & SCHLATTER
C.C. SCHLATTER & CO.
100th
ANNIVERSARY
C.C. Schlatter & Co.
INCORPORATED
1882
1982
SCHLATTER HARDWARE, INC.
PFEIFFER AND SCHLATTER 38
NAILS
GLASS
DOORS
—AND—
SASH
HEADQUARTERS
BUCKEYE
SPRING TOOTH
HARROWS.
HARDWARE
BUCKEYE
BINDERS.
MOWERS.
BARBE

Few companies live to be
one hundred years old. Fewer still
have achieved the regional importance
and enviable reputation for service of
Schlatter Hardware, Inc.

In 1982 Schlatter Hardware, of Fort Wayne, Indiana,
celebrates its one hundredth birthday. With pride
and confidence it reflects upon its past and
prepares for the future. This is the story
of the first one hundred years.

Christian C. Schlatter

Henry Pfeiffer

The Founding Fathers

"It is Formed," a Fort Wayne newspaper ceremoniously announced on February 9, 1899. "Much Talked of Hardware Organization Incorporated." Actually, the proclamation was both two weeks premature and sixteen years late.

The Articles of Incorporation of C.C. Schlatter & Co. were signed on February 14, 1899. A general stockholders' meeting on the twenty-third adopted By-Laws, and the first board meeting the same day elected Christian C. Schlatter president. However, neither C. C. Schlatter nor the company he headed were really new to Fort Wayne.

In 1882 Henry Pfeiffer, a German immigrant from Bremerhaven, had joined Allen County, Indiana native Christian C. Schlatter in a retail-wholesale hardware operation that occupied the old Olympia Theatre building on the northwest corner of Columbia and Clinton Streets, Fort Wayne. Located on the original 1823 Fort Wayne city plat, the building had been gutted by fire on February 4, 1881. The two new partners undoubtedly picked up the remaining shell at a considerable discount.

Seventeen years later, in January 1899, the partnership officially dissolved. After "retiring from said firm," Pfeiffer formed his own retail hardware store, Henry Pfeiffer & Son, at 109 East Columbia Street, one block from his former partner. He did well enough at his new location for a local sage to write of him in 1907:

"Here's a man with the hoe who's not
in dispaire,
But cheerful and useful he's
mighty glad of it.
He's serving a part in a deal that is
square—
A good thing and he's happy to
shove it."

According to the terms of the 1899 dissolution, "Said Christian C. Schlatter will continue said business at the above specified place, and is the owner of all claims, notes and accounts due and owing said firm . . . ." In order to accumulate the capital necessary to maintain the stock of a wholesale hardware trade, Schlatter wisely decided to incorporate.

The original subscription list established one thousand shares of stock at fifty dollars par value per share. C. C. Schlatter was required to purchase $30,000 of the total, the balance divided among fourteen others. Next to Schlatter, M. E. Greenawalt and C. W. Walton were the firm's largest investors, with $5,000 each. George F. Bandtel subscribed to $2,000 in stock, and C. C. Cissell, Henry E. E. Fischer, Jacob M. Stouder, and J. C. Trier each put forth $1,000.

Of the original subscribers, John Zimmerman was secretary-treasurer of the large Zimmerman Manufacturing Co., Auburn, Indiana, in which Schlatter was a minor stockholder. Henry Fischer was a former Allen County surveyor; C. C. Cissell was pastor of the Berry Street Methodist Episcopal Church, and O. E. Richard began a long career with the company as secretary and treasurer. John C. Trier became a chairman of Fort Wayne's Board of Public Works and was elected the company's third president in 1930.

The fifteen founders of C. C. Schlatter & Co. were able men and

C.C. Schlatter Band

Interior — Pfeiffer Schlatter

women — some with experience, some with leadership yet to be proven. They formed a sound nucleus around which to build a company. But there was never any question who was the leader, who provided the inspiration, and who made the final decisions. The real founder of Schlatter Hardware Company was Christian C. Schlatter, himself.

C. C. Schlatter did not look like the dynamic founder of an important regional wholesale hardware business. A short, medium-built man, Schlatter was a quiet, gentle person who loved music, treated his employees with fatherly kindness, and seldom raised his voice.

Christian Schlatter had left Cedar Creek Township, where he had been raised, to attend school in Wooster, Ohio, at age eighteen. After two years in Wooster, during which he had worked in a local hardware store, he moved to Fort Wayne and for ten years was employed by the hardware firm of Morgan & Beach, "so that when he embarked in trade for himself in partnership with Henry Pfeiffer, he knew the business thoroughly."

In every way, Schlatter Hardware reflected the man who led it. C. C.'s love of music, for instance, was reflected in the company orchestra, directed by O. E. Richard, in which the president played the violin. Another personal custom was the annual presentation in the president's office of a five dollar gold piece to each employee the day before Christmas.

C.C. Schlatter

This sensitive, unassuming man was an energetic entrepreneur with considerable ability. He knew how to organize both capital and people, and he was always expanding. Growth was gradual but constant. C.C. Schlatter's twenty years as president were filled with innovation. Every challenge became an opportunity, and the company prospered.

O. E. Scott was hired as the first "man on the road in the interest of the wholesale business" in 1900. A year later the wholesale and warehouse operations were separated from the retail store with rental of the "Old Woolen Mills" on East Superior Street for the wholesale division. In recognition of the Teutonic heritage of Fort Wayne, Schlatter insured that at least some of his retail clerks spoke fluent German. This enabled them to sell effectively to a large non-English-speaking market.

In January 1905 "The President then brought up the matter of dividing the retail stock into departments and appointing one clerk over each department to see that the goods of the same is [sic] kept clean and in order, and report shortages." This important move and subsequent alterations introduced modern mercantile organization to Schlatter's retail operations.

Through this system many people were recruited, promoted, and retained by the company, and a remarkable company loyalty began to emerge. Don Hadley began in the paint department in 1919 at the age

Harry Schlatter

of eighteen; he retired as head of the department in 1980. Albert Trier began in the Superior Street warehouse in 1919 before going on the road for twenty years. He was named a vice-president in 1957 and retired in 1971. Schlatter hired Jacob Petzold as the first delivery man in 1910. He used two horse-drawn wagons until the company switched to a Model "T" truck in 1914. Jacob

retired at age seventy-seven, and his son, Elmer, is now vice-president.

These were the type of people C. C. Schlatter recruited — intelligent, aggressive, loyal. This was the type of company that he created — dynamic, financially sound, farsighted, personal. It was a record upon which to build a promising future.

Hard Times and Recovery

Unfortunately, C. C. Schlatter shared a weakness endemic to fathers. He wanted his son to carry on. His son, Harry Schlatter, did not, however, particularly want to carry on.

Harry had graduated with a degree in chemical engineering from the University of Michigan and had demonstrated no particular interest or ability in the hardware business. Yet, upon his father's death in 1920, Harry Schlatter became president, a position he retained for ten years.

By the mid-1920's, rural mid-America, upon which Schlatter Hardware depended for much of its wholesale distribution, was well into an economic depression. Harry was not the manager his father had been, and even C. C. would have experienced difficulty managing the economic troubles of the late 1920's.

On top of this, the company borrowed heavily to expand the Columbia Street store. The remodeling was forced upon the company by the city of Fort Wayne, which intended to widen Clinton Street. The building on the corner of Columbia and Clinton had to be remodeled or knocked down.

Birt Hollopeter

The company eventually determined to knock eight feet off the west (Clinton Street) side of the building, remodel the interior, and add three floors to the original two-story structure. In order to pay for the improvements, no stock dividend was issued

for 1926, and a $140,000 loan was secured from Lincoln National Bank.

In times past, facilities expansion had always been a sound capital investment. In the uncertain markets of 1928 it was risky, at best, and by 1930 the weight of the loan forced a major corporate restructuring. On October 13, 1930, Harry Schlatter resigned as president. It must have been with great relief that he left the Fort Wayne hardware business entirely in 1935 for the real estate market in Florida, where he died in 1973, eighty-seven years old.

Harry Schlatter was succeeded by John C. Trier, one of the original 1899 investors and a well-respected member of the city's Board of Public Works. But Trier was just a transition figure, respected in the local business community, who served only fifteen months as president. The real controlling force was Birtram M. Hollopeter, who had been appointed both vice-president and general manager (at a salary of $150 a month) upon Harry Schlatter's resignation. In January 1931 Hollopeter also became treasurer, and one year later he became the fourth president of C. C. Schlatter & Co.

Like the company's founder, Birtram M. Hollopeter brought years of

Downtown Office — Second Floor

THIS CERTIFIES

THIS CIRCLE FOR CHAUFFEUR'S PHOTOGRAPH

That Chauffeur's License No. [illegible]

has this day been issued to

Name Jacob Petzold

Age 30 years. Height 5'-9"

Weight 170 pounds. Color of hair Brown

Address 916 Allegheny Street

Postoffice Fort Wayne Indiana,

authorizing said Chauffeur to operate automobiles in the State of Indiana until December 31, 1916.

LICENSEE'S SIGNATURE

Jacob Petzold

Dated 2/11 1916.

Homer L. Cook

Secretary of State

Jacob Petzold

Model T Delivery Truck

hardware experience to his new job. He had been a partner in several local retail operations and had invested in Schlatter since 1918. Indeed, when Don Hadley applied for a job at Hollopeter's store, he had been instructed to apply at Schlatter, "where Hollopeter owned more stock than in his own store."

Birtram M. Hollopeter was a big, broad-shouldered man with a single-minded devotion to making Schlatter Hardware succeed. He demanded complete dedication from his employees and returned it with equal loyalty to them. It was Birt Hollopeter's almost fanatical devotion that, more than anything else, brought Schlatter Hardware safely through the Depression.

Because of an inadequate cash flow, the new president invested his own money on a loan basis to keep the inventory up. He first cut retail clerk hours in half to reduce overhead and then reinstated full hours at one half salaries. Drastic times called for drastic measures.

During the Depression, president Hollopeter sent his salesmen into the field to collect money, not to sell. No salaries were paid until bills were collected. During the worst times, employees were paid with fiber tokens redeemable at some grocery stores. To partially make up for these conditions — and to keep his staff healthy — he bought and distributed apples and vitamins to the employees. When times improved and the company again declared a dividend in 1936, the president began compensating his employees for their suffering; each employee received a bonus equal to one month's wage. By 1948 the bonus had grown to four month's wage. Birt Hollopeter demanded sacrifice, dedication, and

loyalty from his employees, and it was returned.

As Schlatter Hardware pulled out of the Depression, Birt Hollopeter showed the same flair for innovation that had marked C. C. Schlatter. He experimented with an open-house radio show in 1937. The company enrolled employees in night school to improve their salesmanship. In 1939 the company entered the electrical fixture and wiring field, and Schlatter Hardware actively pursued the new Fort Wayne low-cost housing contract in 1940. A new warehouse was purchased on Main Street in back of the original store in 1941, and another was purchased on Columbia Street in 1945.

When Birt Hollopeter died in 1949, he left a strong, dynamic, growing company that had weathered the Great Depression better than many other businesses. He had reinvigorated the enterprise with his own dedication and enthusiasm. The future was secure.

Downtown Building

Cecil Van Skoik

Ed Williamson

The Modern Era

Birtram Hollopeter's death directly affected Schlatter Hardware Company in several ways. First, the distribution of his estate broadened the stock base. Nearly twice as many stockholders owned fifty shares or more in 1952 than in 1948. The result was that for the first time since C. C. Schlatter & Co. had been founded in 1899, no single person or family owned controlling stock.

Secondly, the salary-bonus wage system used since 1936 was severely altered. The new board's first action after Hollopeter's death was to scrap the low salary-high bonus policy in favor of "modest appropriate additional compensation but on a regular basis . . . ."

Thirdly, Hollopeter's will left the "business premises," which he had purchased from Harry Schlatter, to the Bible Institute of Fort Wayne. The company had five years in which to claim the property for $75,000, which it proceeded to do "as soon as possible." Thus, after nearly seven decades, Schlatter Hardware owned the original 1882 building.

Finally, unlike C. C. Schlatter, Birtram M. Hollopeter did not bequeath the company to an heir. This combined with the new stock distribution to open the company to the potential of new leadership. The old era of personal management was gone. The new era of professional management had not yet quite arrived. But the transition had begun.

Cecil C. VanSkoik was chosen the new president in 1949. VanSkoik had originally represented a wholesale company operating a retail hardware outlet in Fort Wayne and had joined Schlatter as a buyer in the 1930's. He became chief buyer and then vice-president under Hollopeter and served as a fair-minded, good-

Ground Breaking

humored buffer between his blustery boss and the employees. Unlike his predecessors, VanSkoik did not own controlling stock in the company. He truly worked for the company, rather than the other way around.

S. E. Williamson succeeded VanSkoik as president in 1956. Williamson had first purchased Schlatter stock in 1918 and had for years been the jobber salesman for the Sherwin Williams Paint Company with Schlatter. His presidency began thirty-eight years after he first associated with the company, and it ended with his death one year later.

S. E. Williamson was succeeded by his son, John. Unlike Harry Schlatter, John Williamson wanted to be president, and he had trained for it. A graduate of the Indiana University School of Business, young Williamson spent six months in the Sears management training program before returning to Schlatter. Then in 1957 the young man who had grown up dreaming of owning his own retail hardware store became president of a major wholesale distributor.

Schlatter Hardware has experienced the greatest growth and prosperity in its history during the last twenty-five years. Much of this expansion has occurred since the November 1967 move from the old Columbia Street building to new offices and warehouse near Interstate 69 in Fort Wayne.

The Fort Wayne Development Commission condemned the old Columbia Street store in 1964 in order to clear the entire area for a new Performing Arts Center. Williamson chose the cloverleaf exchange on I-69 as the place to build — and invest. Schlatter Hardware purchased one hundred seventy-five acres on the northeast, northwest and southeast quadrants of the intersection. The intention was not only to acquire a new home for the hardware company, but also for the other wholesale outlets that were being dislocated by downtown redevelopment.

By the 1950's Columbia Street had become a sort of wholesaler's row, including paint, hardware, and supply companies. Williamson thought that this "friendly competition" in close proximity was not only healthy, but helpful. All companies benefited from referals to and from the other stores.

Before

After

So he planned Merchandise Place as a wholesale distribution complex at the north end of Fort Wayne.

The first builder other than Schlatter at Merchandise Place was Hospitality Motor Inn, now Harley Hotel. The first wholesaler to relocate was National Mill Supply, which had been across from Schlatter on Columbia Street. These were followed by G. E. Supply Co., Graybar Electric, Peter Eckrich & Sons, Pittsburg Plate Glass, Central Electric, Safety Equipment Co. and McJon Camera. The northeast quadrant was sold to Standard Oil of Ohio and the northwest to several other developers.

Ground was broken for the new Schlatter Hardware building on March 11, 1967. The new facility offered 10,400 square feet for office space and 90,000 square feet to the warehouse. Eight months later, ninety truckloads moved 35,000 items to the new building at Merchandise Place. The move symbolized the creation of the modern Schlatter Hardware Inc.

The modern business includes membership in the Liberty Distributors group, four local Schlatter-owned Trustworthy Hardware retail stores in Fort Wayne, and twenty franchise stores in northwestern Ohio and northeastern Indiana. Fourteen salesmen are on the road, four specializing in industrial sales. Schlatter's own delivery fleet was added in 1969.

Much of this growth has been made possible by membership in the Liberty Distributors group, which

C.C. Van Skoik, Harold Pollit, Fred Rocke, Ed Williamson, Dwight Stultz, Roy Mertz

Roy Mertz Retirement

Schlatter joined in 1955. Liberty is the largest wholesale hardware buying group in the country. Through it independent wholesalers can benefit from group buying and compete with the largest marketing chains in the country. Trustworthy Hardware is the franchise name for the buying group. Independent Trustworthy retail stores use Schlatter's group wholesale buying power to receive the lowest possible prices. Thus, Schlatter's is an important link in preserving the small, independently-owned retail store that is threatened with vanishing from the American landscape.

John Williamson
Current President

No Mystery
There's no mystery in good paint making. It's only "cheap" and inferior paint that surrounds itself with secrecy and mystery.
THE SHERWIN-WILLIAMS PAINT
is not a "patent" or "chemical" paint. There's no secret or mystery about it. It's a pure lead, pure zinc, and pure linseed oil paint. It's better than other paints made from the same materials, because the methods and manufacturing facilities of its makers are better—not because they have any patent or secret scheme.
S. W. P. always gives satisfaction and saves money.
Zu verkaufen von
C. C. Schlatter & Co.'s
Eisenwaaren-Handlung,
202-204-206 Ost Columbia St. Fort Wayne, Ind.

German Newspaper Advertisement

Old Sales Meeting

The Future

It is a remarkable feat to live to be one hundred, especially for a business. Schlatter Hardware has succeeded because it has had able, dedicated leaders. C. C. Schlatter knew the importance of keeping modern. Birt Hollopeter worked for almost nothing and invested his own money to save the company from the Depression. And John Williamson saw an opportunity for investment, expansion, and diversification in moving to the new corporate headquarters. These are men of which any company would be proud.

Schlatter Hardware has also succeeded because of its employees, a tremendously loyal group of men and women who have been and remain dedicated, not only to their jobs, but to their company. Don Hadley, Albert Trier, Dwight Stultz and Clarence Seelig, the four senior retired employees still alive, share over 187 years of employment with Schlatter. Ione Brendel was receptionist for over forty years, and many other employees have been with the company for twenty years or more. This is a remarkable record for which there is no substitute.

And, finally, Schlatter Hardware has succeeded because the retail hardware dealers of Indiana and Ohio have succeeded. Membership in Liberty Distributors assures both Schlatter and the retailers that they will continue to have the necessary edge to compete successfully with the large national retail houses.

Schlatter Hardware has grown into a major regional hardware distributor because it has always looked to the future. Today Schlatter still has every reason to be optimistic about its future. All of the ingredients are present for continued success — in the second hundred years.

By David Crosson, Director
Allen County - Fort Wayne Historical Society

100th Anniversary

PRIVILEGED TO BE SERVING FORT WAYNE AND THE TRI-STATE AREA IN OUR 100th YEAR!

1882–1982